TAPE NO.

TAPE INDEX

NARRATOR Berggreens

INTERVIEWER P. Lotz

PLACE 3rd St., Solvang

DATE Jan. 25, 1985

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Interview with Axel and Marie Berggreen
Date of Interview: January 25, 1985, 3rd Street, Solvang
Interviewer: Phyllis Lotz
Transcriber: Phyllis Lotz

Begin Tape 1, Side 1

PL: Introduction

I'd like to ask Mrs. Berggreen about her grandparents?

Mr. B: My paternal grandparents were both born in Denmark, my grandfather in 1847, my grandmother in 1848 or 9 while her father was fighting against Germany. He was a game keeper on a big estate in Denmark. My father's parents came to the United States in 1869 and my father was born in Nebraska in 1874. On my mother's side, my mother was born under German rule in Flegwickholsen, her father was born in 1840 in Denmark and her mother was also born in Denmark in 1848. My paternal grandfather was John Johnson, but in reality it was Johan Jurgensen, which they made him change when he arrived in America, he always regreted that. My father's name was Hans Christan Johnson, known as Chris Johnson. My mother's father's name was Nels Nielsen. Mother's name was Anama Greta. My grandmother died when Mother was little and Grandfather remarried and then the step-mother died and Mother raised the four small half brothers and half sisters. Mother and Grandfather came to this country in 1906. The reason that her brother and half-brother came to America was so they did not have to fight under German rule, as my grandfather had to do in 1864.

My father, Chris Johnson came to Solvang in 1911 and my

mother came in 1912 to be a cook at the hotel. Mother and her father were in Iowa from 1906 to 1912, as my uncle had settled there.

PL: It seems there was always a relative that encouraged the person to come to America.

Mr. B: Yes, of course, in the years of my paternal grandfather there were always agents in Denmark trying toget people to immigrate to America. This agent was from Wisconsin and wanted them to go there but another agent said, "Go to the praire, don't wear yourself out in the woods." My uncle came because he didn't want to be a German soldier. All my grandfather could think of was getting to America and away from that threat.

PL: Was that the reason why your paternal grandparents came?

Mrs. B: No, he was a step-child and after his father died he did not inherit land, he was called Jurgensen. If landed you were Jurgen but if you had no land your name became JurgenSEN. Thats why so many names are PeterSEN, NielSEN, AnderSEN.

My parents were married here in Solvang and I knew my paternal grandfather because he lived with us until I was grown.

PL: Did your grandfather speak about coming on the boat to America?

Mrs. B: They came steerage but later he went back two or three times but not in steerage. My grandmother died before I was born.

PL: How did your father find out about Solvang?

Mrs. B: It was in the papers and the Danish church, he knew some of the people involved, Mrs. Gregersen and Mrs. Hornsyld always argued as to which one of them encouraged my mother to come to Solvang. They both knew Mother in Grand View and they always needed cooks here in Solvang, at the hotel

PL: How old was your mother when she came?

Mrs. B: She was born in 1873 so she was 39 when she came and she was 40 years old when she and my father were married.

PL: Did your father talk about how Solvang looked in those early years?

Mrs. B: Well, they were building the hotel, and he and Jake Svensen lived in a tent so there wasn't much here during those first years. Father had been a farmer in Nebraska but had sold out and moved to Portland, Oregon. His mother died in 1911 so he went back and brought his father out. My dad's uncle and aunt lived in Portland, their name was Harksen. (who later came to Solvang and established the first bank) Dad and his brother had a store but he wanted to come down here. He was with those first people of the Danish- American Colony when they looked at Laytonville in 1910, as property for the colony.

PL: What was the reason they did not choose Laytonville?

Mrs. B: As there was not enough farming land. Gregersen had a surveyor measure the land and they found there just wasn't enough farming land. The wooded land wasn't good enough for farming. In those first few years out here the mid-

western farmers had to learn different ways to farm. You don't farm in California the way you do in Iowa, or Nebraska.

PL: So what did you father do in those first years in the colony?

Mrs. B: He was a jack of all-trades that first year, he poisoned squirrels too. He only met Jake Svensen after they both got here. The hotel was where everyone met and at the old school that they used until Atterdag was built.

PL: Did you mother come out to California alone?

Mrs. B: She came with her sister. The Gregersens wanted her to come to Solvang. And my aunt worked in the kitchen too.

PL: Did you mother tell you anything about working at the hotel?

Mrs. B: I remember her telling about the time she put a water glass down for Father Buckler and he told her to take it away, he said, "water is to wash your feet in." He would come over to the hotel to eat, but I never heard Mother speak of Mame Goulet, the Father's niece.

PL: Your father and mother were married, where was their home?

Mrs. B: Their first home was on Chalk Hill(north of Solvang) The house was later town down, it is now called Viking Hills. The home was almost where Chalk Hill Rd and Ballard Canyon Rd. met. Dad farmed around there and the land was pretty good, but it hasn't been farmed for years After my mother died my brother and I divided up the property, he kept the ? land and Anker Johnson bought

that later. My brother is Harold Johnson and he now lives in Santa Maria. There were just the two of us.

PL: Where were you born?

Mrs. B: I was born in the adobe down on what is called the Duff Property, where Friedship House is, in 1915. I am the oldest. I don't know how long they kept that lying in hospital down there. My brother was born the next year and he was born in the house where King Fredrick Motel is now on Mission Drive. The Shaws had the lying in hospital and the doctor was Dr. Luton.

PL: Do you remember some of the children you played with in your childhood?

Mrs. B: The Wulff boys, Magda Jensen Rutters, Clara Skitt Pohls, the Skytt boys, the Bruns came when I was in second grade. The school I attended was where Denmarket Square is now, Mission and Alisal. It was a one room school down Alisal Rd. from Mission, called Ynez School, but by the time I started school, they had built this newer two room school. The first grade teacher was Christine Burchardi and later we had Mrs. Eileen de la Cuesta and Mrs. Alice Lyons Potter, I had for quite a few years, I went there the 8 years.

PL: When you started school, could you speak English?

Mrs. B: No not much as we spoke Danish at home. Most of the children here spoke Danish. My father when he was in Nebraska was told he could speak Danish at home but when he was in school he would learn English. My mother always

lived among the Danes, she never really did learn English too well, but she could get along. So many people spoke to her in Danish it was natural to speak it here. My dad and I would start out in one language and switch to the the other.

PL: How old were you when your mother died?

Mrs. B: I was grown, 32. I had been out working for quite a few years. After Mother died Dad, my brother, lived on the farm. Then my brother moved away and Dad came to live with my husband and I. In 1960 he moved to the Lutheran Home.

PL: Did you go on to high school?

Mrs. B: Yes, I went to the old high school building in Santa Ynez. Some of the teachers were Mr. Bensky, Mr. Grigsby, Josephine Winkler, Alice Smith. And others I have forgotten. Sescot was principal at first and then Mr. Colnor (?).

PL: Did you have any favorite classes?

Mrs. B: Grigsby taught math, Bensky taught algebra, Mrs. Miller taught Spanish, Miss Gary had Home Economics.

PL: Were there any special events at school that you remember?

Mrs. B: One big thing was that we took the train down to see Old Ironsides. We didm't have football but we had tennis, a lot of tennis. At lunch time we would go to the Zanja de Cota Creek, near the high school, and catch turtles. I had to walk a ways to catch the bus to ride to school. Earlier when I was in grammar school, I got a ride with a neighbor, Arne Madsen's sister.

PL: Did you have chores to do around the farm?

Mrs. B: I don't remember about chores before school, but I was to do the ironing after school. I never even learned to milk a cow.

I came back during the war years and helped my Dad on the farm when my brother was in the Navy. I was the sheepherder.

My dad started out with 220 acres of colony land and at that time he paid $60.00 an acre. And he farmed his father's 80 acres across the road with a horse and plow. During the war he bought a tractor and it would scare me to see him plowing on the hillsides.

PL: What year did you graduate from high school?

Mrs. B: 1933, during the depression. Of course everyone was in the same boat during those times, we never went hungry, we wore second hand clothes but we were much the same as others. Solvang was quite small then and we knew just about everyone and those in Los Olivos too. We would go swimming in the river.

We had a car as long as I can remember so I never had the chance to ride the narrow gauge railroad, and we didn't make many trips as we had cattle to tend. My folks would go to Gaviota Beach a lot. We would take a picnic lunch. So many times going to Santa Barbara we would have a flat tire. I can barely remember the big barbecue in Buellton when they opened Highway 101 on the new route over Nojoqui Grade. Taking the San Marcos Pass road took a long time,

it was the old road before Cold Spring Bridge.

PL: After high school did you start working?

Mrs. B: No, I stayed at home because my mother was ill, then I went to work in Santa Barbara as a maid. In 1936 or 7, I went back to Grand View Folk School. After I came back from Iowa I worked again in Santa Barbara and then during the war I helped on the farm here.

PL: Why did you go back to Grand View?

Mrs. B: My mother had gone there and also my brother, it was the folk school with winter and summer classes. I took the train back there and when I returned to California I came by bus. While I was there I visited my relatives.

PL: How did you meet your husband?

Mrs. B: I was working with my father on the farm and would come into town to get free air for the car tires. You see he had the service station. I had learned to drive on my father's old Essex. My father said he wouldn't have a girl working on the farm who could not drive.

I did not met my husband until I came back from Iowa, my brother knew him. I could not leave my mother as long as she was sick, then my brother came back from the war and things settled down a little so we were married in 1946.

PL: I'd like to turn now to Mr. Berggreen and ask him about himself.

Mr. B: I was born in Wisconsin in 1911, Feb. 16. I came to Solvang in 1940 in March. A good friend of mine was coming out and he told me I should move to California and

settle in Solvang. I was working on farms and cutting wood in Wisconsin. My father died when I was very young, he had worked on the Northern Pacific Railroad. He was rather old when I was born.

We had to walk two miles through deep snow to get to school in winter. The name of the school was North Star. All the education I got was through 8th grade and then I had to get out and work.

I had one full sister and several half brothers and sisters. My sister is living here at the Lutheran Home, her name is Flora Berggreen Sparks.

PL: When you first came to Solvang where did you live?

Mr. B: I lived with friends and then in a rented house in town, I had a shoe repair shop in the house. I had learned that trade in Wisconsin. The shop/house was on Main Street. It was a good business, then after awhile I got a service station and made more money there. Then Marie and I got married.

PL: In 1940 the depression was still on so a lot of people still had their shoes repaired?

Mr. B: Yes, and then the war started and I could not pass the physical as when I was 17 I had an accident to my hand and they would not take me. I had been climbing a fench when the shotgun went off and took two fingers of my right hand.

PL: Do you remember meeting your wife?

Mr. B: She used to come into the service station and then we

finally had a date.

PL: What and where did you go for entertainment in Solvang?

Mr. B: We would go to the movies, Axel Niesen had a theater on Alisal Rd. They had a couple of shows a week and Atterdag was our second home, we would dance there and I played cards a bit. We would have coffee and people brought cake and cookies.

PL: Was it hard to see Atterdag torn down?

Mrs. B: No, not bad, it was in such bad condition and we needed the Lutheran Home. It didn't bother me.

Mr. B: Beside having the station, I was a taxidermist for 50 years. I learned the trade from books that came from the Northwestern School of Taxidermy. A neighbor had the books and I borrowed them to learn. I still have those books. I have done quite a bit of taxidermy work here, one summer I did seven mountain lions. They were made into rugs with the head still on. I made more money doing the work here than in Wisconsin.

While I had the service station I became the first tire inspector in the valley. It was a Standard Station. Deliveries of gas came from Santa Maria.

PL: Where was your first home?

Mrs. B: We went up to Oregon and bought a place, we had a 101 acre ranch there, but sold it after 13 months. Our daughter was born there. We were able to make $3,000 on it.

Mr. B: I was interested in fishing and hunting and it looked like a good place for that. We had a mink farm too and brought

those minks down here to Solvang. We raised them and sold them. But we found out it did not pay to keep raising them. Our daughter Alice was born in Eugene, Oregon in 1947 and she was 9 months old when we returned to Solvang. Our son, Arthur was born in October, 1948 and they both live in Santa Barbara. He was born in Lompoc.

PL: Why Lompoc?

Mrs. B: There was no hospital here, and I had to have a cesarean so I needed to be in the hospital. Dr. Van Valin was the doctor. The children grew up here and attended grammar and high school.

PL: Do you have any grandchildren?

Mr. B: Our son has a little boy and we have an adopted family living in Lompoc that we see quite often.

Mrs. B: After the children were grown, I worked in different shops here in Solvang.

PL: After the Saturday evening Post came out with that article on Solvang in 1947, did you see a change?

Mrs. B: Not as much as for the last 5 or 6 years.

Mr. B: Some of the old towns in the Mid-West have just become a bump in the road, because people have moved away but here the tourist industry has made this town grow.

Mrs. B: I have met so many nice people passing through, and the town is prospering. We live far enough away from down town that it does not bother us. And it helps with the value of our property.

PL: Elverhoy, the new Danish Museum is very close to you, how

do you feel about that?

Mrs. B: It is such an interesting building and I don't think it will bother us to have tourists there.

PL: How long have you lived here on 3rd street?

Mrs. B: 15 years, before that we were on Chalk Hill Road.

PL: The two of you have operated the Lutheran Home Thrift Shop for many years?

Mrs. B: Yes, for over 10 years, in Buellton. I was on the board of the Lutheran Home and we were trying to find ways to make money for the home, and so we started the Thrift Shop, and it has had six different locations around the valley. Now we have a good place in Buellton, on 2nd Street. But it is always hard to find volunteers to run the shop.

PL: What are your plans for the future?

Mr. B: I am not too well and we will stay here. I enjoy watching the birds.

Mrs. B: I am worried about the supply of water, how many more people can we take before we run out of water for this community? If Solvang becomes incorporated I think that will be good, as then the bed tax will stay in this community.

PL: Thank you both, Mr. and Mrs. Berggreen for this interview. End of interview.